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A 1975 interview with Queen's inimitable, unforgettable, front man

FREDDIE MERCURY

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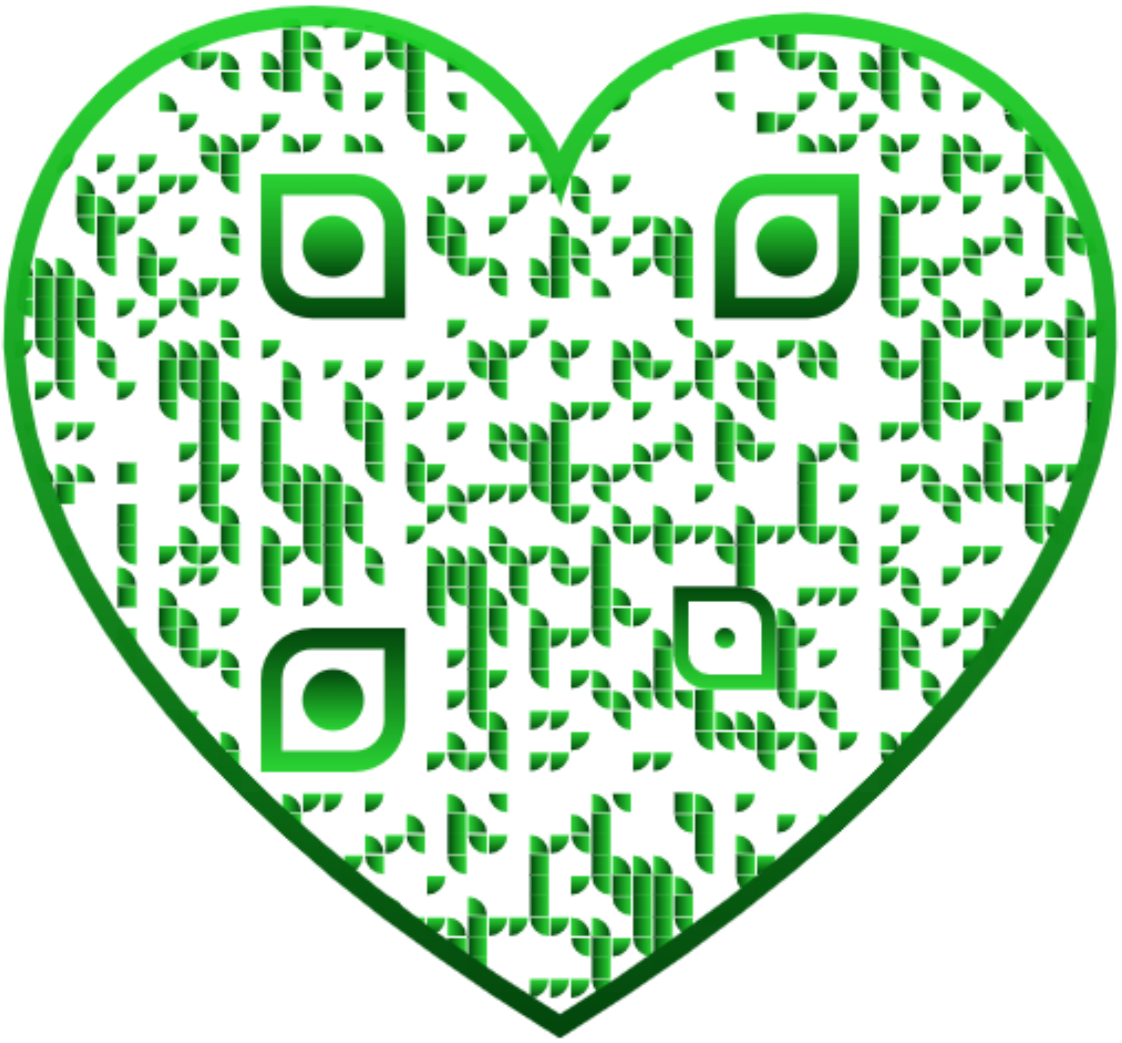

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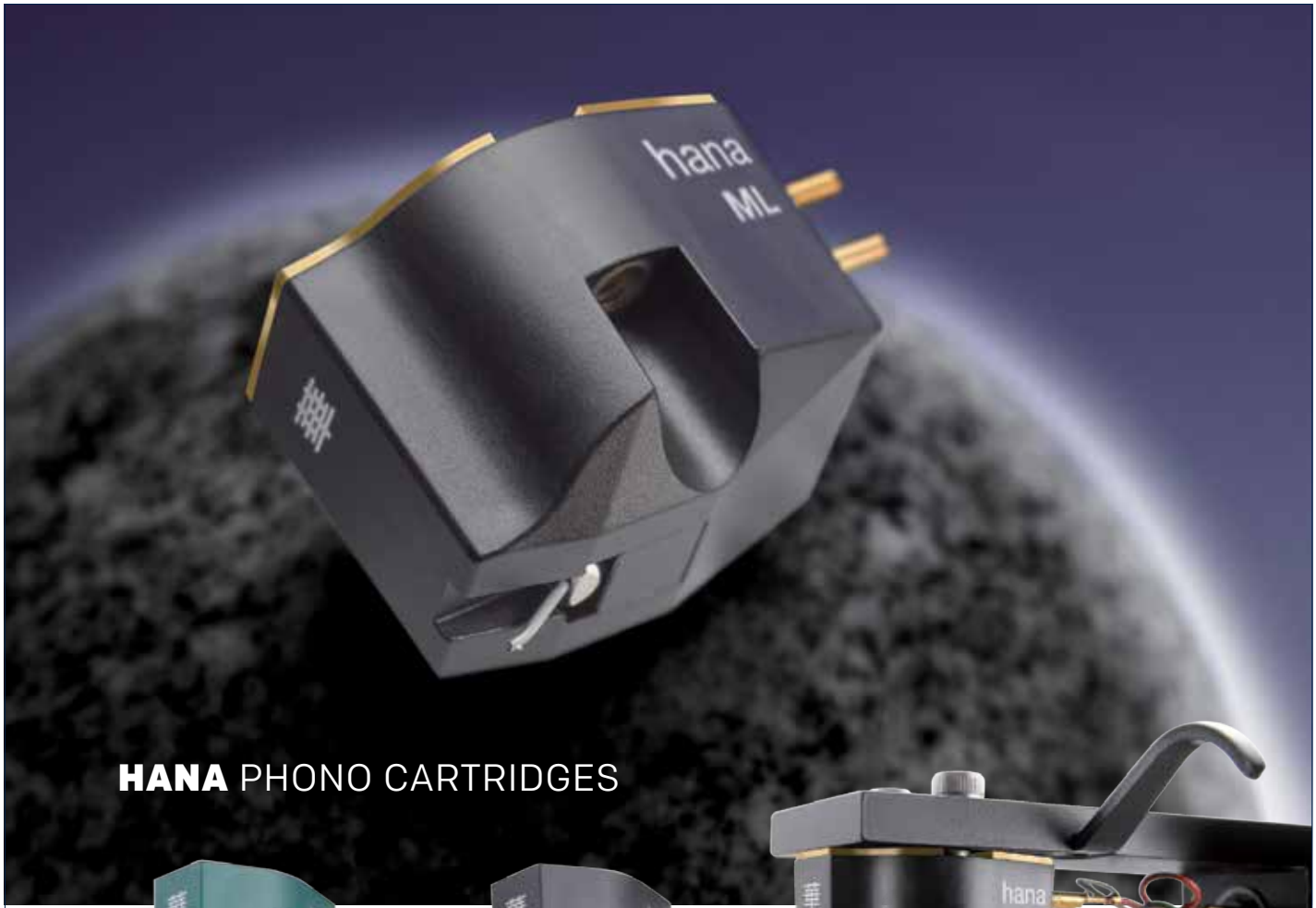

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ON THE COVER
Frank Zappa
Photo by Gail Zappa

Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible.
– Frank Zappa

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McCartney, Motown and Marley

BY JIM KAPLAN

SPRING AND SUMMER are stacking up with a plethora of concerts along with album and CD events.

Paul McCartney has a May 17 release of *Egypt Station-Explorer's Edition* on Capitol Records. It coincides with the start of the U.S. leg of Paul's "Freshen Up" tour.

Paul's 2019 North American dates begin in New Orleans at the Smoothie King Center and conclude in Los Angeles at Dodger Stadium. *RCN*'s Harvey Kubernik, who penned our cover story on Queen for this issue, along with his profile of Al Green and his record producer, Willie Mitchell, will be on the scene.

DURING 2019, THE LANDmark Motown Records label will celebrate 60 years. *Motown: The Complete No. 1's*, 208 Motown Chart-Toppers in 11-CD Collectors Box Set Digital Anniversary Edition, is set for June 28 release. Expect *Hitsville: The Making of Motown* documentary due in 2019.

THE **BOB MARLEY** FAMILY, Island Records and UMe join forces to observe the 35th anniversary of Bob Marley & The Wailer's *Legend* with a double 180-gram vinyl reissue.

Legend holds the distinction of being the world's best-selling reggae album of all time with over 15 million copies sold in the U.S. This vinyl-only, 35th edition comprises the original version with the addition of two original U.K.-only cassette bonus tracks "Easy Shanking" and "Punky Reggae Party."

I'VE BEEN ENJOYING THE **Run Out Groove** label's recent releases. Available titles include *Devo Turnaround: B-Sides & More* and Cher's *3614 Jackson Highway* expanded edition. Look for the first vinyl release of *Tiny Tim At the Royal Albert Hall*.

"Run Out Groove is a vinyl-only imprint under the WMG-umbrella that allows fans the opportunity to vote on the next modern-day collectible," explains Matt Block of his label.

"Run Out Groove releases limited, high quality recordings of new custom collections, unreleased masters from the vault and out of print reissues pressed to demand. In two years ROG has issued titles from MC5, The Stooges, Morphine, Dr. John, Dream Syndicate, Echo and the Bunnymen, Luna, Dexter Gordon, Type O Negative, and many more."

Out in May is ROG's *Germs' Live* At the Starwood December 3, 1980. It certainly made a big impression on a *RCN* reader, Carlos "Cake" Nunez, a former *Flipside* magazine writer.

"When The Germs reformed for their way-over-sold-out show at the Starwood Club on December 3, 1980, vocalist Darby Crash said to the crowd 'We did this show so you new people could see what it was

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like when we were around. You're not going to see it again.'

"Four days later, Crash was gone by suicide and no one would ever see the likes of him again.

"An essential live punk shows for the ages is finally available on vinyl for the first time (sans bad quality bootlegs from the past). If you love The Germs, then this is it!

REIMAGINED, REFINED, revived are the words that best describe **Marty Brown** and his new album, *American Highway*, on Plowboy Records. After a two-decade self-imposed "break" from major recording, the hit songwriter and producer returns with a lovely collection of tunes co-produced with Jon Tiven (B.B. King, Wilson Pickett and Waylon Jennings) who co-wrote nine of the disc's 10 songs with Brown, and one with the addition of Marty Brown, Jr.

REAL GONE MUSIC CONTINUES its journey through the **Grateful Dead**'s *Road Trips* series with one of the most coveted entries in the *Series Road Trips Vol. 3 No. 3 — Fillmore East 5-15-70* was initially released exclusively to the Dead's online audience as a 40th anniversary celebration of the album *Workingman's Dead*.

COMING MAY 10 TO BLU-RAY and DVD is a documentary, *Bachman: Special Edition The Story of Randy Bachman* from his early days in the Guess Who to **Bachman-Turner Overdrive** to present day. John Barnard is the director. Neil Young is featured in the documentary.

I'M VERY HAPPY TO SEE A hardcover publication of *Sound Explosion! Inside L.A.'s Studio Factory with the Wrecking Crew* now out from **Wrecking Crew** Publishing. Order it now at wreckingcrew-film.com. If you've seen the Wrecking Crew documentary, this is a great addition to your library.

MAN'S BODY, THE LOS ANGeles and Chicago group from bandleader Greg Franco, has a delightful 2019 CD *Put Your Family In It* and finishing up a new studio expedition.

ROCK AND ROLL MISSIONARY **Steven Van Zandt**, aka Little Steven, has a new album out with his band Little Steven and the Disciples of Soul.

Summer Of Sorcery is available on CD, digitally and on vinyl as double LP on 180-gram black vinyl via Wicked Cool/UMe label. A wide-ranging world tour is now underway. Each show on the American tour will benefit Van Zandt's TeachRock education initiative and offer an introduction to the Teachrock.org curriculum.

WE AT *RCN* ARE DEEPLY saddened by the death of **Gary Stewart**, community activist and veteran music and recording executive for Rhino Entertainment and Apple iTunes who had a lifelong devotion of service to music. Gary was always a real-to-reel supporter of *RCN*.

Steven Van Zandt tweeted, hailing Stewart as "one of the great record men of all time. Music will miss his enthusiasm which just took another step toward extinction."

Harvey Kubernik had a friendship with Gary dating back to 1977 and spotlighted Stewart's wisdom in a couple of his books.

Read Harvey's requested tributes to the beloved Stewart, *Requiem For a Mensch: Gary Stewart, 1956-2019* at ugly-things.com/requiem-for-a-mensch-gary-stewart-1956-2019 and longer appreciation on cavehollywood.com.

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It's Dax-a-rific

Musician Danielle Dax is celebrated with a reissue of *Dark Adapted Eye*

BY GILLIAN G. GAAR

IN THE DAYS BEFORE people had blogs, they put together fanzines — Xeroxed publications painstakingly put together with text you banged out on a typewriter (if you wanted to look more professional; others simply wrote out copy by hand), and photos you clipped from a magazine — to share their obsessions.

I did one on Kate Bush ("For the Love of Kate"). I quickly began exchanging letters with other Kate fans who wrote in for a copy, which sometimes led to exchanging compilation tapes. One day such a tape arrived with a song called "The Wheeled Wagon," and that's how I discovered Danielle Dax.

Danielle Dax is a fearless UK musician who started out in a very experimental group called the Lemon Kittens. In 1983, she released her first solo album, *Pop Eyes*, on which she wrote and sang all the songs, played all the instruments, produced, and created the disturbing cover art (a grotesque face collage, made from pictures in medical journals). Now, that's a solo album!

The music was minimalist, the lyrics cryptic. The opening track, "Bed Caves," has a sinuous Indian flavor, and three spare lines of lyrics: "Today not the same as before/Starting with a clean slate/Promises of new rewards." The clattering "Wheeled Wagon" is on *Pop Eyes*, and I still have no idea what it's about.

She brought in David Knight to work on her subsequent records (Karl Blake continuing to make guest appearances), filling out the sound. On 1984's *Jesus Egg That Wept*, she uses a slowed-down sample of Doctor Ross's blues track "Juke Box Boogie" as a bed for a sinister depiction of racism. The rhythmic "Hammerheads" looks at another dark aspect of human nature; those who make it a point to be unpleasant to others for no other reason than that they can.

Singles and the album *Inky Bloaters* (1987) followed. Self-sufficiency was the watchword. In addition to producing herself, Dax set up a record label to release her work. "It's just that there was no one to do it, so I did it," she told me in 1990. "It was just a step away from doing at home in Karl's bedroom. It didn't seem like such a big deal. It never really has."

Her records enjoyed some success on the alternative charts in the UK, and she was generally described as a "cult act," somewhat to her dismay. "I always thought my stuff was really commercial, even

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

the early stuff, because I was so naïve and my tastes are so weird anyway, a lot of the time," she said. "I don't have this big art trip where I want to be some obscurest playing for 200 people forever. I think that's pointless. It is possible to do things which are mainstream but with integrity."

In 1988, she seemingly got a break, signing with Sire Records in the U.S. To introduce her to American audiences, a compilation called *Dark Adapted Eye* was released, 12 tracks on the vinyl album, 19 on the CD and cassette. It was basically an expanded version of *Inky Bloaters*, with a couple of single sides and two tracks from *Jesus Egg*.

After being out of print for years, it was apparently reissued in 2008 on a label called Noble Rot. I missed that iteration, but it's just been reissued on CD again, in a revamped format, by Rubellan Remasters. This edition has 15 tracks from the original version, drops the *Jesus Egg* tracks, but adds four new bonus tracks, some making their CD debut.

It's not easy to describe the music, as there's no one obvious signifier. You couldn't call it "alternative rock," because while it may be alternative, there are far more influences than just "rock" going on here. The glorious "Flashback" is irresistibly Bolan-esque, in addition to being another ode to self-sufficiency ("Next minute you're in there fighting/The stakes are high/Never won any major battles/but I always try"). Sampling reveals further influences; the intro of Captain Beefheart's "Frying Pan" provides the backdrop for Dax's "Yummer Yummer Man." Then there are a couple of country and western stompers; "Inky Bloaters" (sneaky poltergeists) and "Bad Miss 'M'" (a diatribe about then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher).

Political themes turn up repeatedly in Dax's work, though not necessarily explicitly (it isn't obvious that "Bad Miss 'M'" is about Thatcher). Religion is another target, addressed in "Big Hollow Man," which Dax describes as being about "The corruption of religion, and the abuse and elimination of complete cultures by religion. I find there's so much hypocrisy. Religion and politics are always used by people to gain power, and I find it interesting. I find the abuse of power and the corruption of power fascinating." The song's protagonist offers salvation, but the devastated souls who follow him walk away with nothing. Dax's voice soars on the chorus, and drops down to a stern lower register in the verses.

One of my favorite Dax tracks is "Sleep Has No Property," a song that brings its subject — insomnia — to vivid life. A series of looped sounds builds up, one upon the other, replicating that infernal racket and rattling that goes on inside your head when your thoughts keep whizzing around as you're trying fall sleep. Dax's vocal is set to another Indian snake charmer melody, and there's a positively blistering, squalling guitar solo that courses through the song's final two minutes. It used to startle people when I played it on tape deck while walking down the street.

It's not easy to describe the music, as there's no one obvious signifier. You couldn't call it "alternative rock," because while it may be alternative, there are far more influences than just "rock" going on here.

The album also has newer single tracks that hadn't appeared on *Inky Bloaters*. "Cat House" is Dax's rock 'n' roll updating of blues songs that filled their lyrics with fun sexual innuendos ("Gonna polish up your chrome and shine your treasure"). Though Dax told me she thought the video was "crap" (she wanted to do something more interesting), it does give a sense of her visual appeal. Earlier in her career, Dax had sometimes been tagged as "goth," more for her looks, than the music's sound; in "Cat House" she's a swinging Sixties go-go dancer, with a bouffant and form fitting dress (of her own design). I think it's rollicking good fun.

"White Knuckle Ride" was the other recent single at the time. The title is a play on words; Dax had seen the phrase in an ad for a roller coaster, and it's also a euphemism for masturbation. It's a short sharp shock of a song, directly linking sex and violence, inspired by such heinous acts as the 1987 Hungerford massacre in the UK, as well as Charles Manson's exploits (the song's protagonist is "Charlie" and there's a Manson soundbite dropped in at the end).

Of the bonus tracks, "Cold Sweat" is the standout; no, not a cover of the James Brown song, but a dance club track that'll help you trip the light fantastic.

Dax returned with a new album, *Blast the Human Flower*, in 1990. But it wasn't the breakthrough she hoped for, and she parted ways with Sire, perhaps best summing up the situation in the title of her 1995 compilation: *Comatose-Non-Reaction: The Thwarted Pop Career of Danielle Dax*. But if you look around online, you'll find more than a few folks paying homage to her. And reissues like this one also help keep interest in her work alive. Her music may have been overlooked. But us diehard fans will make sure it's not forgotten.

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– Jim W.

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FREDDIE MERCURY

A Visit and 1975 Interview with Queen's Freddie Mercury

BY HARVEY KUBERNIK

Actor Rami Malek is the 2019 Academy Award-winning recipient in the Best Leading Actor category for his portrayal of the late singer/songwriter Freddie Mercury in the Queen biopic *Bohemian Rhapsody* which has now generated a global gross over $800 million.

Century Fox Home Entertainment during February released a DVD, Blu-ray and 4K Ultra HD disc of *Bohemian Rhapsody* and was available digitally January 22.

It includes the full, uncut, never-before-seen Queen Live Aid recreation coupled with the original footage. The DVD, Blu-ray and digital edition will also incorporate behind-the-scenes segments with the film's cast along with Brian May and Roger Taylor discussing the making of the film.

I went to see *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Although there were some chronological errors and revisionist history in the motion picture, I was very impressed by Malek's star-turn as Freddie Mercury.

I didn't realize how many people have flocked to see *Bohemian Rhapsody*, and possess Queen-sanctioned video/DVD products, and constantly devour their audio catalog. I vastly underestimated the band's devoted fan base and avid collectors. They've sold between 170-300 million records.

My frame game public and online profile has been more visible after being filmed along with Queen co-founder's guitarist Brian May and drummer Roger Taylor in their 2012 *Queen at 40* documentary, directed by Matt O'Casey for BBC Television and issued and expanded as *Queen: Days Of Our Lives The Definitive Documentary of the World's Greatest Rock Band* as a 2014 DVD and Blu-Ray via Eagle Vision regularly broadcast on cable TV outlets.

I was a celluloid pundit reinforcing Queen's legacy and became part of their visual and print/online documentation, a ramification of product participation.

I was subsequently quoted describing Queen on brianmay.com "As American journalist Harvey Kubernik put it, 'it wasn't rock 'n' roll, it was Broadway.'"

Queen's 1976 stage repertoire included an encore of Cy Coleman and Dorothy Fields' song "Big Spender" initially done on the boards by Shirley MacLaine in the Broadway musical *Sweet Charity*. Mercury first heard Shirley Bassey's 1967 version of the tune on BBC Radio and then by Liza Minnelli. "Big Spender" is on *Queen Live at Wembley '86*.

During the last two months I was politely stopped nearly a dozen times at various locations in Southern California to discuss Queen by civilians, not show business folks, by super market and gym workers, an Enterprise Rent-A Car employee, two bank tellers, a food server at a Chipotle Mexican Grill counter in Hollywood, inside the drum department at the Sherman Oaks Guitar Center, noshing at Canter's Delicatessen, and a couple of encounters at record stores by well-meaning patrons all inquiring about Queen and especially Freddie Mercury.

When I was lensed for a 2013 BBC4-TV James Meycock-directed documentary on Bobby Womack, *Across 110th Street*, along with Bill Withers, Antonio Fargas, Damon Albarn of Blur and The Gorillaz, Chuck

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

Freddie Mercury
of the band Queen

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

D of Public Enemy, Barney Hoskyns and Ronnie Wood, it was only musicians who asked me about my pal Bobby on screen.

This summer of 2019, Queen + Adam Lambert will tour North America for 23 dates called *Rhapsody*. A press release hails it as experimental and rule-defying as the hit-packed Queen back catalog." The tour begins in Vancouver, British Columbia on July 10 and concludes on August 23 in Charlotte, North Carolina.

"This is a great opportunity," offered Brian May. "Our last tour featured our most ambitious production ever, and got us our best notices ever. So we decided to rip it apart and get even more ambitious! Watch out, America!"

Roger Taylor exclaimed, "We are ready for America and raring to get back in the saddle."

Their new lead singer Adam Lambert added, "We have been designing a brand-new spectacle that will reframe these iconic songs and we are excited to unveil it!"

I remember a 1977 Queen-centric incident in Southern California when current Sirius XM deejay Rodney Bingenheimer, in his 1966 black Cadillac Fleetwood Brougham picked up Taylor and May at the Beverly Hilton Hotel and they schlepped out to the city of Fullerton in Orange County, to catch a show by The Runaways at a high school.

When the lads arrived, the head of campus security quickly spotted the loudly-dressed long-hair trio walking on campus and stopped them in their tracks demanding that they immediately leave the premises.

Rodney then pleaded with the school Principal, "We're here to see The Runaways play. These are members of Queen!"

He swiftly responded, "I don't care if they are King!"

I SAW QUEEN PERFORM THREE times during the seventies and also interviewed Freddie Mercury twice- Once in Beverly Hills for the now defunct *Melody Maker* and in London during 1975.

Our first conversation was at the Beverly Hilton Hotel. It was a Special *Melody Maker* report *Killer Queen Slay America!*

Mercury regally waltzed into the room, stuck out his hands, and greeted me and fellow journalist Justin Pierce with "Hello darlings. What do you think of my black finger nail polish?"

I quickly replied to him, "Freddie, I grew up in Hollywood. I know what kind of paint color real Queens wear. So while in L.A. why don't you go over to Ball Beauty on Fairfax Ave? My cousin Shelia Kaye and Cher get their makeup supplies at that shop. It's near Norty's Music Center. Ask one of the girls at your Elektra Records label office on La Cienega Blvd. to drive you there."

Mercury poured a glass of champagne and requested "to please put the tape machine on." Freddie was a yenta and thoroughly enjoyed

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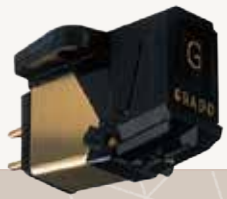

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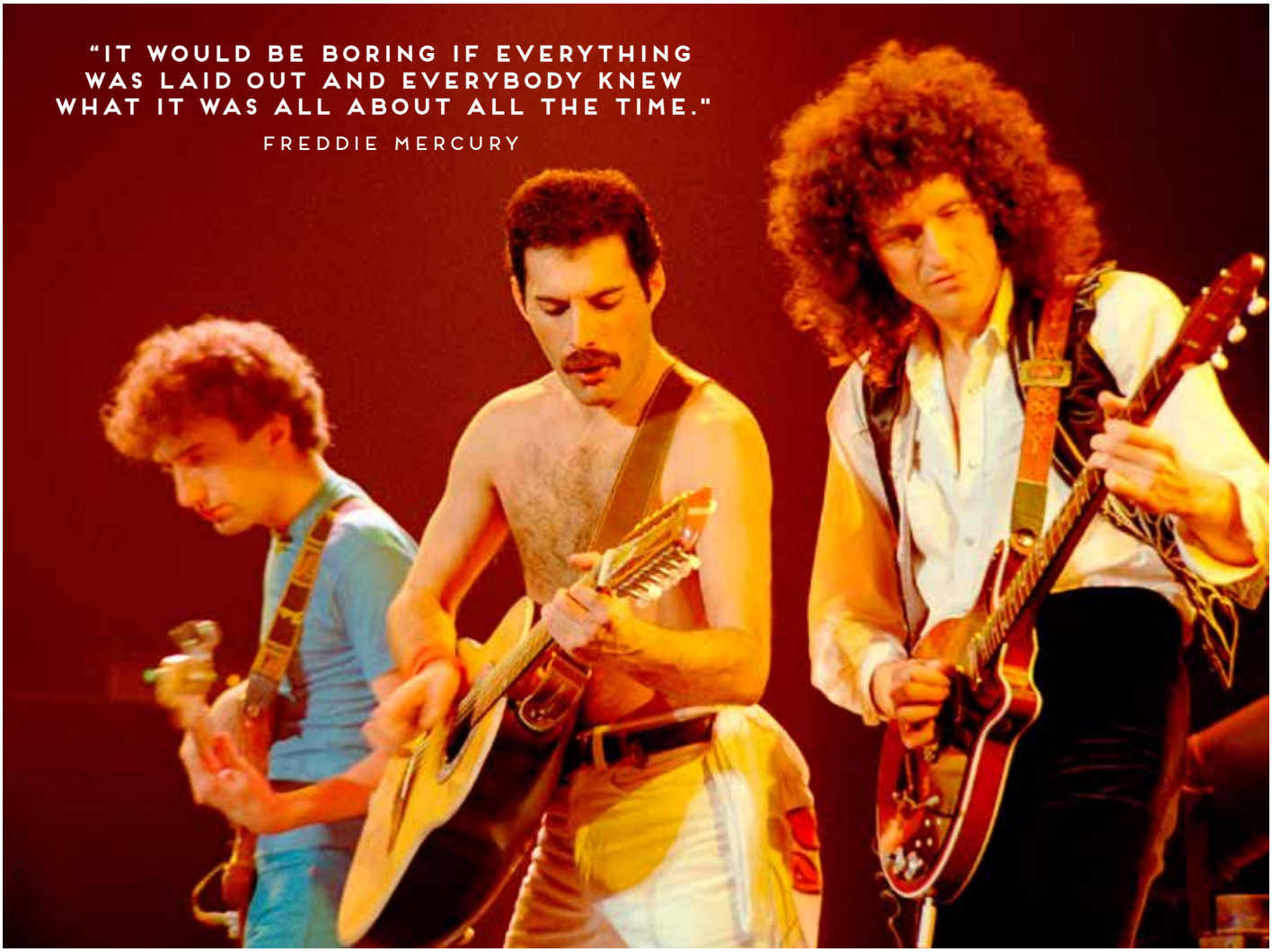

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trumpeting Queen and discussing the machinations of their mid-seventies career.

We must have spent the first 10 minutes just talking about Liza Minelli and Judy Garland.

I saw Judy sing in 1963 at her CBS-TV *Judy Garland Show* taping in Television City in a memorable duet with Barbra Streisand. In 1975 I sat next to Liza at a Rolling Stones 1975 Fabulous Forum concert. Freddie had seen Minelli at the London Palladium in the very early seventies.

Mercury was stunned. "If you come to London do call my publicist Tony. We must do this again." And we did, but this time he was wearing green nail polish.

Freddie had an air of confidence and mega-stardom destiny about him. The boy had a keen sense of the pop music process and about being a star on and off the stage.

To tell you the truth, I was much more interested in talking to Freddie about the time when he, Taylor, and May cut versions of "I Can Hear Music" b/w "Goin' Back" under the pseudonym Larry Lurex - than I was about discussing his sexuality.

That session was around the time of the recording of Queen's debut album (for legal reasons, they couldn't call it a "Queen" single). Current SiriusXM host Rodney Bingenheimer still spins "I Can Hear Music" by Larry Lurex on his Sunday shift.

I also had a delightful chat with Brian May after a Queen show at a party Elektra Records tossed in Hollywood where Brian informed me he saw the Jimi Hendrix Experience a few times.

May recalled in 1967 he was on the entertainment committee at Imperial College in London who booked the trio for a cheap rate. Before Queen and Smile, Brian was in a band 1984 that opened a show for Hendrix or played at a venue with him.

In my last conversation with the visionary A&R man, and former record label executive at UNI/MCA and later 20th Century Records, Russ Regan, he lamented one failure in the music business was not acquiring Queen in 1973 for a North American deal, losing out in a bidding war to Jac Holzman at Elektra.

Regan gave The Beach Boys their name and at UNI inked Elton John to the company and Barry White to 20th Century. "I loved Queen's songwriting, harmonies and the sound I heard on the tape sent to me."

So, I think it's a perfect time after 44 years to write about Queen again and Freddie Mercury, utilizing my Stateside 1976 interview with him, reminding the world about this talented, charismatic performer, and truly charming character.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

"THIS AMERICAN TOUR IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE. TO UNDERTAKE THIS KIND OF MASSIVE TOUR IS NOT UNHEARD OF, BUT IT IS A RISK."

FREDDIE MERCURY

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FREDDIE MERCURY 1975 INTERVIEW

IT WAS MID-AFTERNOON IN BEVERLY Hills as Freddie Mercury peered over the spacious swimming pool of the Hilton Hotel and reflected on Queen's latest tour of the States.

"The tour has been going just great. The only drawback has been the problems with my voice, which I've been overtaxing. But since I've been taking care of it and resting more, it's been fine. The problem is that when you do a tour, you try to schedule the concerts as close as possible.

"Therefore, it's like a constant workout. However, at this moment it's raring to go and at the conclusion of this tour, we're going to take a rest in Hawaii, which we really deserve. From there it'll be on to Japan and Australia."

The success story of Queen is remarkable when one considers the time in which they've become one of the world's most popular bands. In Japan, they were recently voted one of the top three bands in the world, and that's without even doing one date in the Orient.

What does Freddie see as being the key to their phenomenal following? "I can't pinpoint it, but there's something about our music that's different and unlike anybody else's.

"I believe that's our major strong point. But there's other ingredients. Besides the fact that our timing has helped, there is the fact that we take risks. We're not one of those groups that go through every stage, for we skipped a few hurdles and we're willing to take the chances that brought us to our level of acceptance.

"This American tour is a perfect example. To undertake this kind of massive tour is not unheard of, but it is a risk. People were constantly telling us about the American economy and how the biggest groups are having trouble filling venues.

"And for us to come on as strong as we are, headlining after only half a previous tour, shows how confident we are, or what you can put across unless you were a headliner.

"And now we've proved we can do it. Here we are, the first time in L.A. and we've sold out two shows, and it's simply an amazing feeling."

That feeling is bound to be even greater on subsequent tours for Queen who are only now breaking into the American record charts with their single recording of "Killer Queen" from *Sheer Heart Attack*.

The gentleness and buoyancy of the tune is in marked contrast to the high level of energy that characterizes their first two albums.

It is only on the third album that the diversity really became apparent. However, Mercury really doesn't look at it as a great change: "The thing I hate is trying to pinpoint everything for everybody.

"People always ask questions like, 'Why did you write such and such a lyric and what does it mean? That's now what it's all about. The one thing the British press has been trying to do for years is to pinpoint and categorize. It really annoys us.

"We came out with 'Keep Yourself Alive'

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as a single, which is raunchy, and then we decided on 'Killer Queen' for a latter release. The first thing they do is go up to you and ask 'What are you up to?' This is our music and it's up to the individual to interpret it. It's not up to us to come out with a product and label it.

"It would be boring if everything was laid out and everybody knew what it was all about all the time. I like people to make up their interpretation.

"They also want to categorize my stage image. I remember back in an interview where I said, 'I play on the bi-sexual thing.' Of course I play on it. It's simply a matter of wherever my mood takes me. If people want to know and ask me if I'm gay, I tell them it's up to themselves to find out. I'm just being my flamboyant self and having a good time," he smiled.

Even though Mercury prefers not to try and analyze Queen's music, he discussed their cumulative work in a logical manner: The first LP was very raw and full of freshness.

"It was simply a reflection of what we'd been doing for so long and we just wanted to get it out of our system. On the second album we found out that even though we had a formula we didn't necessarily have to keep it.

"Therefore, we dabbled at other things. *Sheer Heart Attack* was something different again. We wanted to make it interesting for ourselves as well as the listener. Hopefully, we succeeded on both counts. When we're on stage we try to do the same thing.

"We're perfectionists. Although all of us write, it doesn't necessarily mean that every song composed will appear on an album.

"Having all the members write adds to our versatility, and that's another strong point. On the last album we wanted to create a certain feel, and did. However, there were so many ideas and things that we wanted to do and have yet to carry out.

"You simply can't do everything on one album. Lots of groups eventually burn themselves out due to lack of new ideas. But at this point, there's no way we're going to burn out. In fact, presently we're stronger than ever.

"We do rock 'n' roll, and our presentation is just a way of putting across the music. We view albums and concerts as two spheres of work. There's a different level in the studio as compared to when you're on stage. But when we're before an audience we let loose," Freddie underscored.

Mercury was at the end of the US tour. It was interesting to know how he felt the English music market differs from the American.

"Even though singles may have been more important at one time in Britain, I feel that the stress on the singles and the albums is becoming pretty even. If you play too much on singles you can quite easily become a singles group.

"At that point it's almost impossible to revert back to albums. I feel we're in a fortunate position for we've only released four singles, including our new one. Therefore, we've achieved a balance. I think the same thing is true in America, though we've had to rely on response to our albums to carry us through. It wasn't really till 'Killer Queen' that we received mass exposure on a commercial level.

"Back home, you have to be very careful of what you say or do because you're in a position of immense responsibility. In fact, it can sometimes get ridiculous.

"We have this black-and-white theme that we carry out in England and it's very strong. It has even got to the point where the audiences dress and look like me to a tee. They're very faithful and it's beautiful. On this tour, in Dallas, there was even a fan

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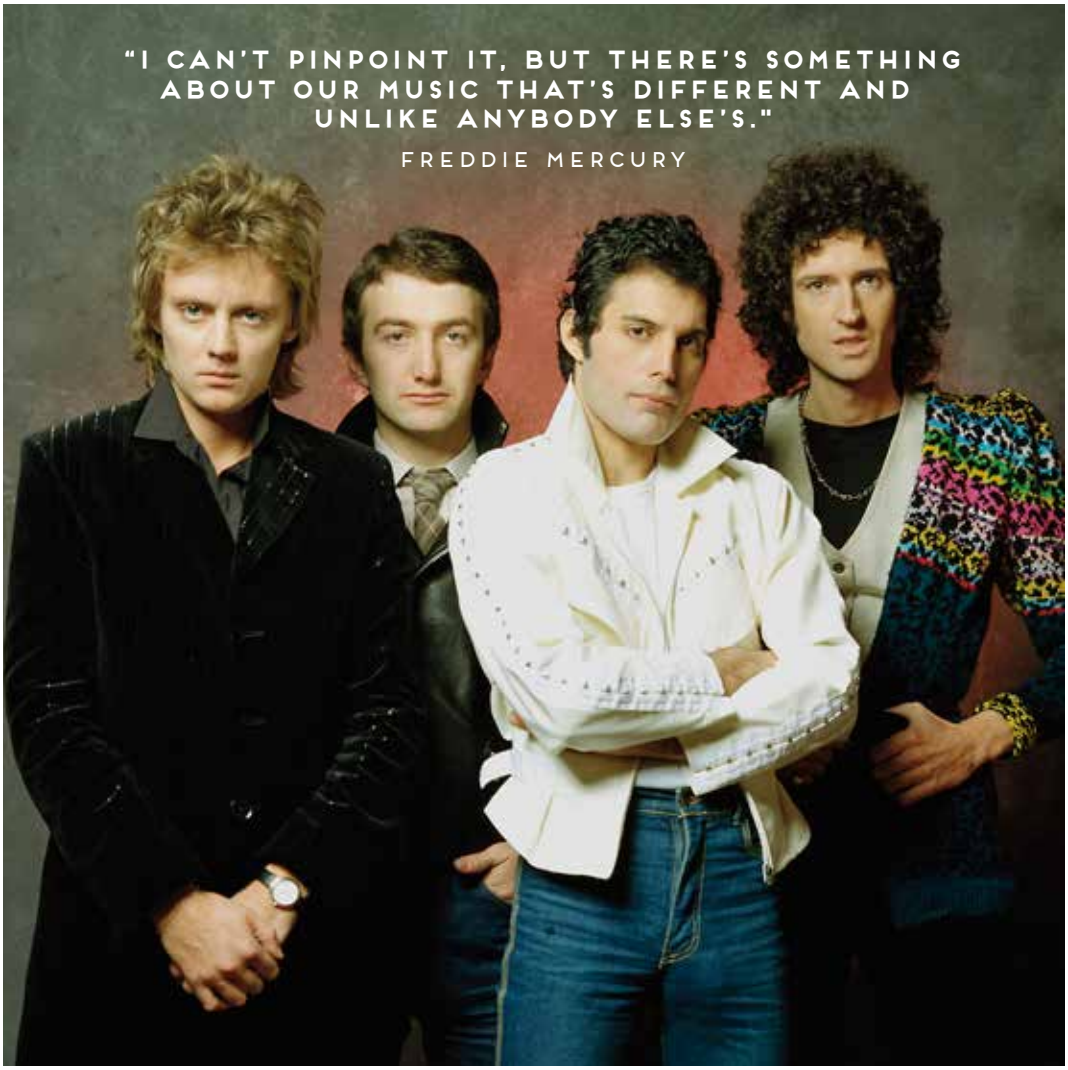

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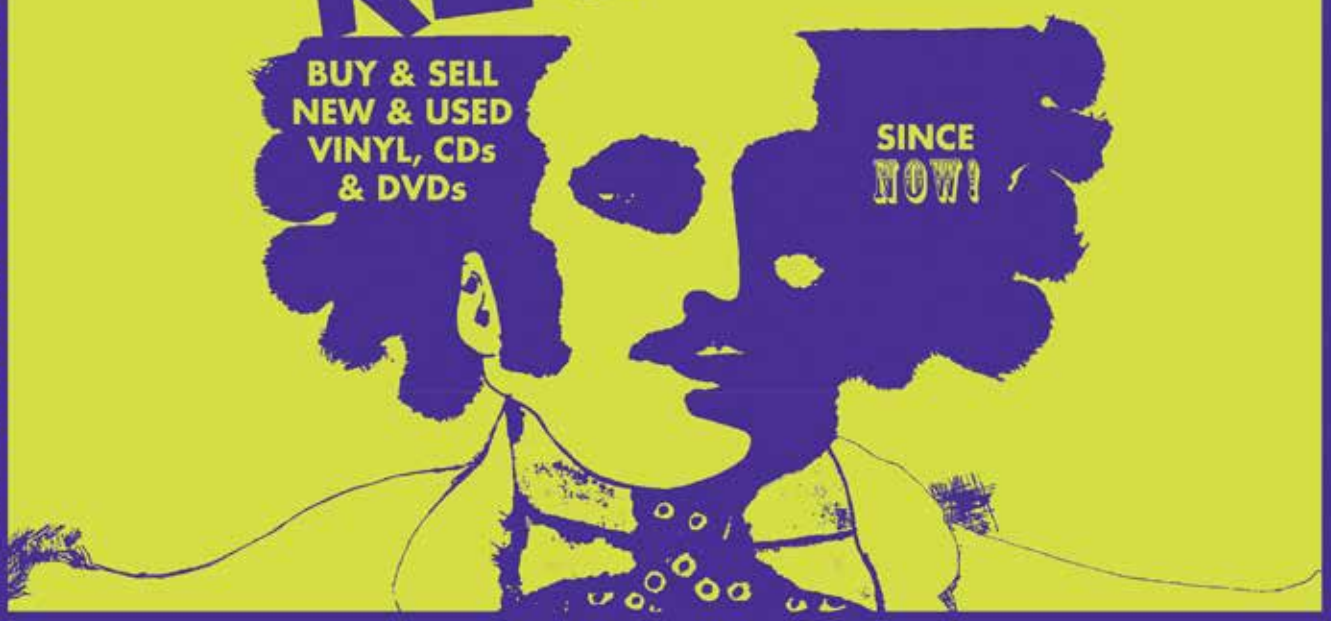

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dressed with black makeup on one side of his face and white on the other, and it was marvelous."

As for his own musical tastes Mercury says: "I listen to all kinds of music from Hendrix to Liza Minelli, all the way back to Mae West. I also enjoy Flo & Eddie when I hear them on the radio. They're simply a riot.

"I also enjoy Joni Mitchell tremendously, and am constantly awed by her vocal phrasing as well as the amazing things she writes. She's simply beautiful."

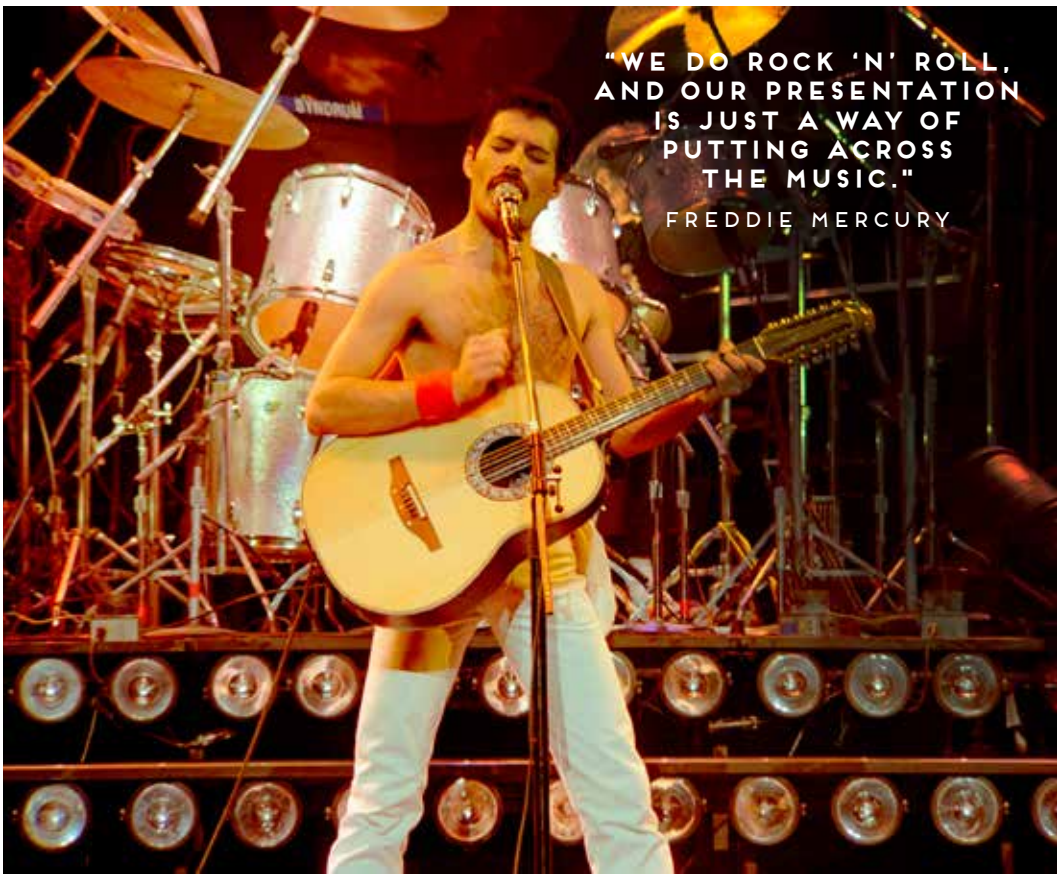
Besides devoting the last few years to Queen, band members took time to record a single "I Can Hear Music" and "Goin' Back" pressed up under the name Larry Lurex.

I'd never associate Queen with Brill Building songwriters Jeff Barry, Ellie Greenwich, Phil Spector, Gerry Goffin and Carole King or expect cover versions of The Ronettes and The Byrds. I asked Freddie, how did this come about?

"It was simply a by-product. We'd already completed our first album [at Trident Studios] and a producer friend [Robin Cable] told us about this record he wanted to put out just for fun.

"He said he wanted us to do it, but we told him he couldn't use our name. Actually, there were quite a number of studio musicians on it besides ourselves. It was in the days of Gary Glitter and Alvin Stardust.

"We never took it quite seriously since it didn't have anything to do with Queen. It was only when we achieved popularity and people started figuring out that it was us that anybody was interested. It was just something rock stars dabble in once in a while and I was quite pleased with the outcome."



Queen + Adam Lambert have announced The Rhapsody Tour for 2019.

Harvey Kubernik is an author of 15 books. His literary and music anthology *Inside Cave Hollywood: The Harvey Kubernik Music InnerViews and InterViews Collection Vol. 1*, was published in December 2017, by Cave Hollywood. Kubernik's *The Doors Summer's Gone* was published by Other World Cottage Industries in February 2018. During December 2018, Sterling/Barnes and Noble published Kubernik's *The Story of The Band From Big Pink to the Last Waltz*.

This century Harvey penned the liner note booklets to the CD re-releases of Carole King's *Tapestry*, *Elvis Presley The '68 Comeback Special*, The Ramones' *End of the Century* and Allen Ginsberg's *Kaddish*.

Kubernik's writings have been printed in several book anthologies, including *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats* and *Drinking with Bukowski*. He is the project coordinator of the recording set *The Jack Kerouac Collection*.

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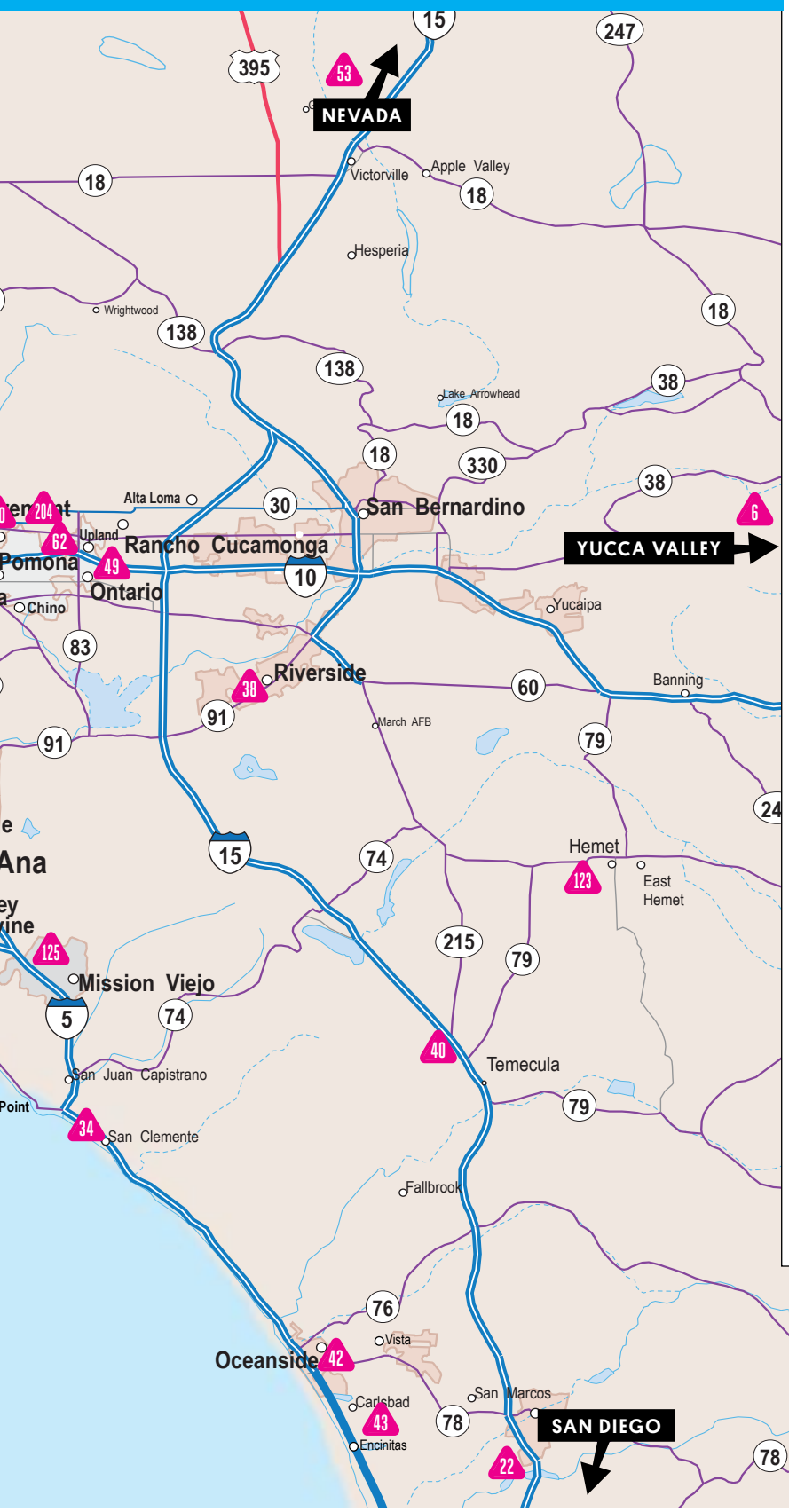

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4	Grady's Record	2546 E. Main St	Ventura	93003
201	Jockamo Records	522 E. Santa Clara St	Ventura	93001
2	American Pie Records	1412 Tower Square #2	Ventura	91502

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59	Voodoo Vinyl	765 W Lancaster Blvd	Lancaster	93534

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11	Soundsations	8701 La Tijera Blvd	Westchester	90045
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29	Audio Element	117 E Union St	Pasadena	91103

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204	Upscale Audio	2058 Wright Ave	La Verne	91750

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36	Black Hole Records	115 S Harbor Blvd.	Fullerton	92832
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40	Old Town Records	42012 Main Street	Temecula	92590
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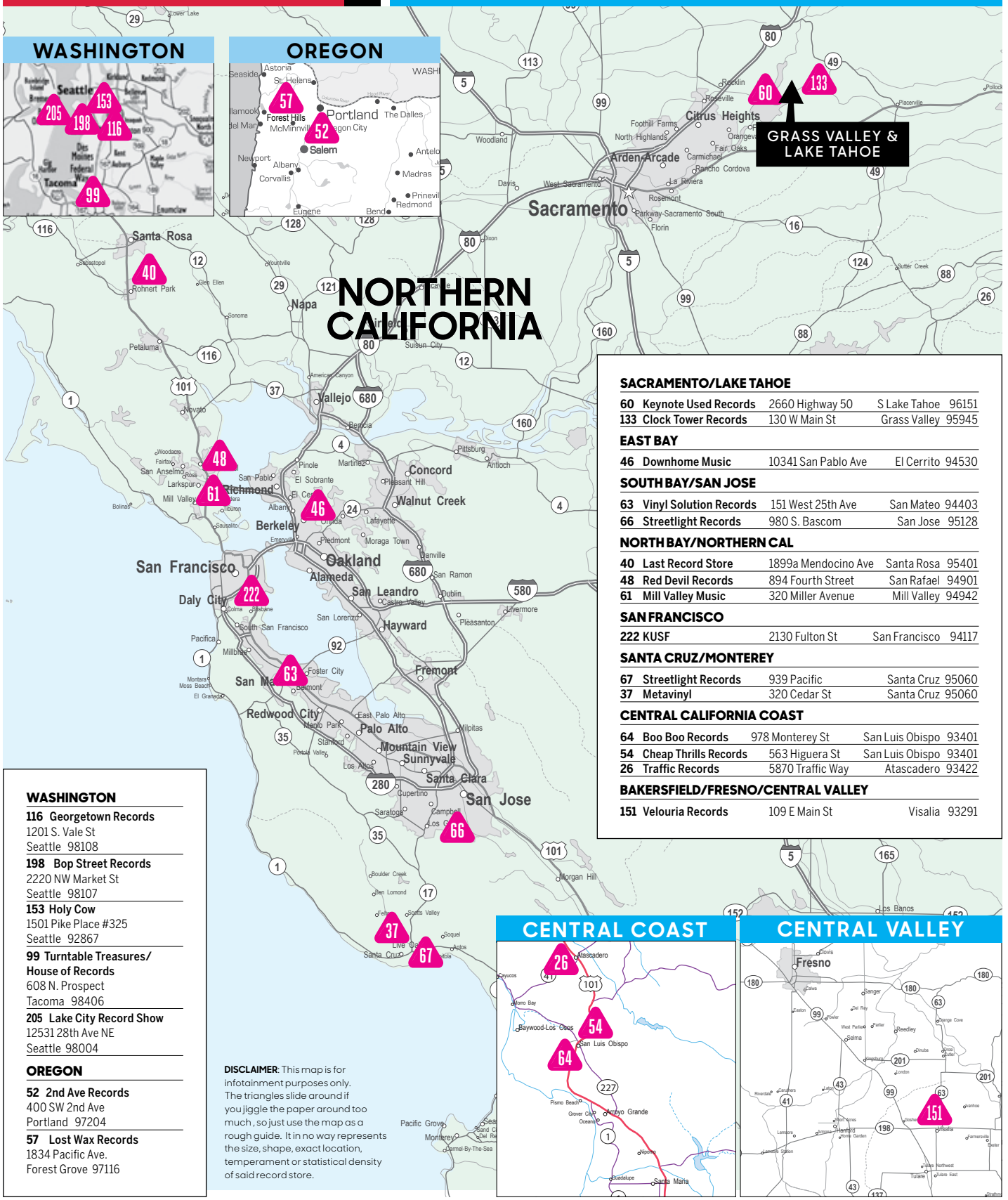

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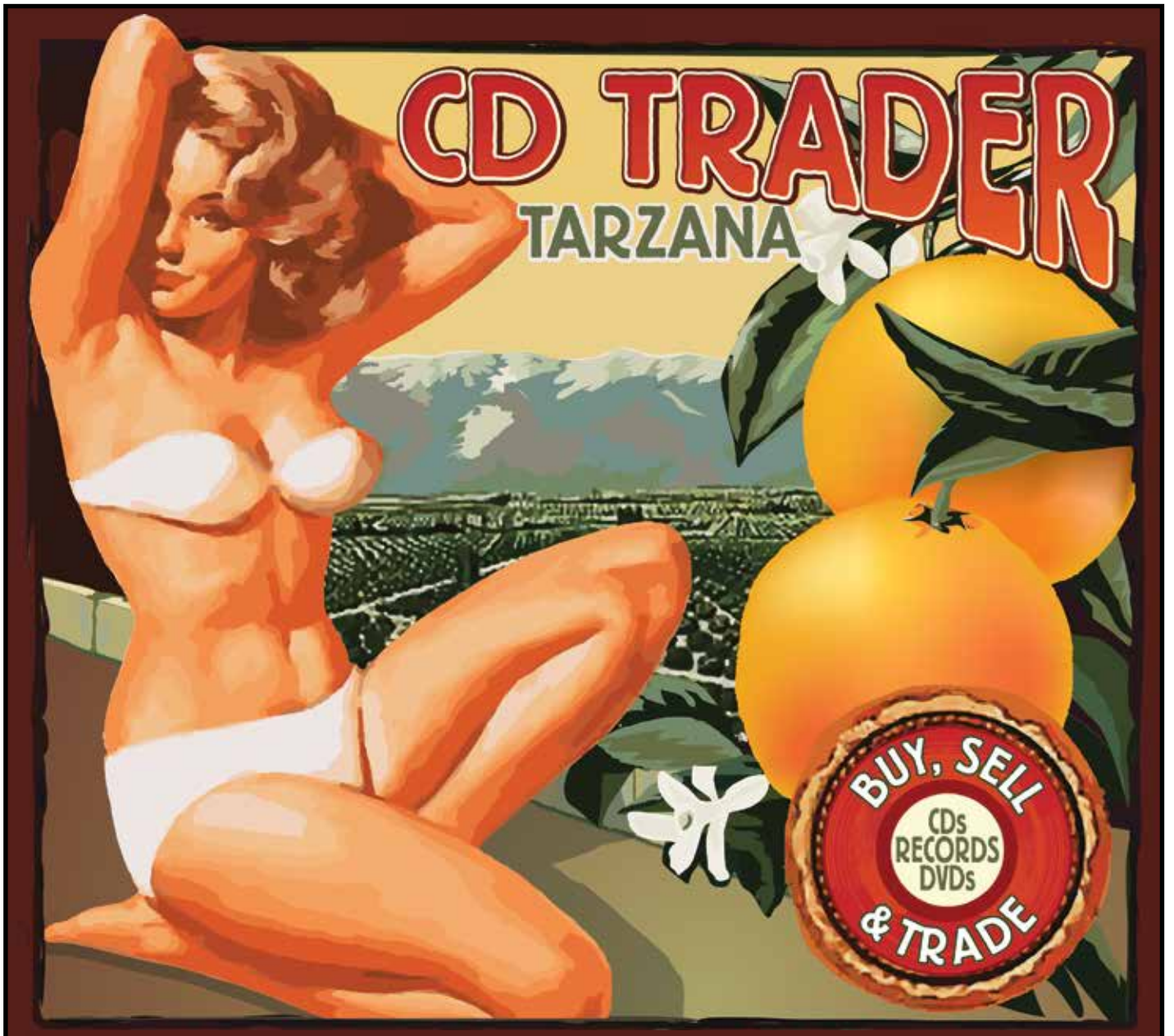

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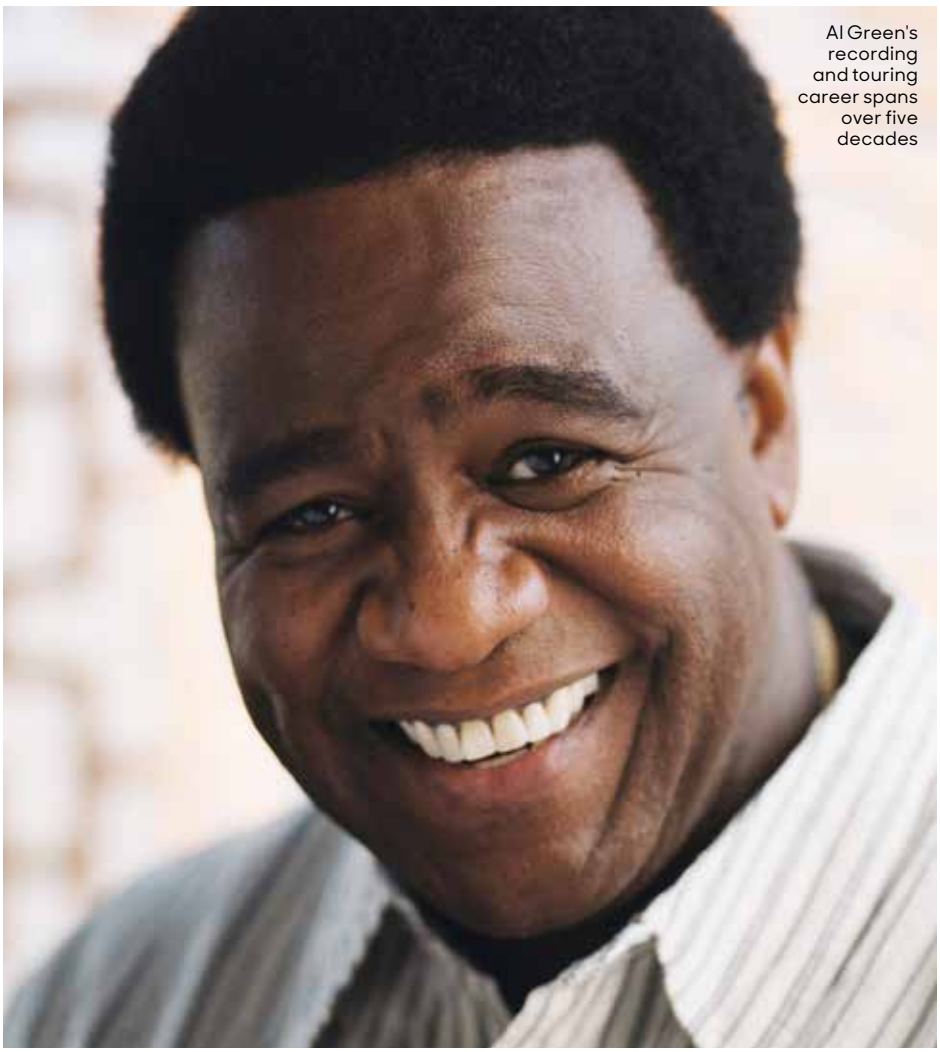
The Al Green Sound

An interview with Hi-Records' Willie Mitchell, the producer behind much of the chart-topping success of the legendary multi-genre singer

BY HARVEY KUBERNIK



Al Green's recording and touring career spans over five decades

CHRISTIAN LANTRY

SINGER AND SONGWRITER Al Green just concluded a US tour, including a May 9 date at the Greek theatre in L.A.

With a highly successful recording and touring career that spans over five decades, Al Green's musical roots originate in Memphis, but he has made an undeniable and lasting impact on music and musicians around the world from R&B, soul, and pop to blues and gospel.

Throughout his career, he has earned a long list of hit albums and singles starting with his breakthrough release *Al Green Gets Next To You* in 1970 featuring his first Top 10 hit single "Tired of Being Alone," and 1972's *Let's Stay Together* which reached No. 1 on the Top R&B Albums chart and No. 8 on the *Billboard* 200 with the title track hitting No. 1 on both the Hot 100 and Top R&B charts concurrently.

Green continued his chart success with back to back hits including 1972's platinum selling album *I'm Still in Love With You*, 1973's *Call Me*, featuring the hit single "You Ought To Be With Me," 1973's *Livin' For You*, 1974's gold selling *Al Green Explores Your Mind* and 1975's *Al Green is Love*, all hitting No. 1 on *Billboard*'s Top R&B chart plus the Top 20 R&B hit albums *Full of Fire* (1976) and 1977's H*ave A Good Time*.

In 1975, Al Green released his platinum selling collection *Al Green's Greatest Hits* which reached top 20 on *Billboard*'s Top 200 and No. 3 on the Top R&B chart, and packed with hits including "Let's Stay Together," "Call Me (Come Back Home)," "How Can You Mend A Broken Heart" and "Tired of Being Alone."

In the '80s, the now Reverend Al Green returned to the music he was raised on, and for the next decade, he focused on Gospel music. His first Gospel album was *The Lord Will Make A Way*. His fans followed his new path and he continued his chart success with 1983s *I'll Rise Again*, which hit No. 4 on the Top Gospel Albums chart, garnered a Top 10 hit album with *Trust In God*, and 1987's *Soul Survivor*, reached No. 1 on the Top Gospel Albums.

He returned to pop music with *I Can't Stop* (2003) and 2008's *Lay It Down*, put Green back on the pop meter with a No. 9 and No. 3 on the Top R&B chart.

Al Green continues to receive praise and accolades most recently being celebrated in Washington D.C. at the Kennedy Center Honors in 2014. In 1995 he was inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame.

Today, Reverend Al Green dedicates his time to his ministry in his hometown of

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Memphis, Tennessee. In 2018, he recorded and released "Before The Next Teardrop Falls," his first single in almost 10 years.

Rolling Stone magazine listed him as one of the 100 Greatest Artists of All Time while the music site Pitchfork proclaimed Al Green as "The Greatest Living Soul Singer."

Behind Al Green's ascension in the 1970's hit parade was the hands-on addition of Hi Records producer/bandleader/trumpeter Willie Mitchell who since the mid-'60's veered the label into state-of-the-art R&B recordings.

Al Green, Don Bryant, Ann Peebles, Willie Jackson, O.V. Wright, Syl Johnson, Otis Clay, Bill Black and many more were part of the Hi Records stable, launched in 1956 initially as a rockabilly and instrumental label.

MITCHELL AND HIS BAND provided the musical entertainment at several New Year's Eve parties for Elvis Presley at his Graceland home in Tennessee. The Beatles on a 1964 U.S. tour stop met Mitchell at his Royal Studio when the Bill Black Combo opened a show for them.

In 1968 Mitchell had his own instrumental top 40 single in the U.S. charts "Soul Serenade" on the Hi Records label. It was a cover of a jazz tune penned by King Curtis and Luther Dixon initially cut by Curtis in 1964 for Capitol Records. I saw Mitchell and his band in Orange County at a Disneyland stage in the late sixties.

The timelessly sensual groove of soul singer Al Green and the Hi Records Memphis sound has been released, re-packaged and downloaded for years.

For those seeking an introduction to Green's catalog or a compilation of his hits, seek out a four- CD set *The Immortal Soul of Al Green*.

There's also a three-CD package *Hi Times: The R&B Years* focused on a magical era with church-soaked vocals and soaring falsetto leads underlined by the almost-mathematical production work of Willie Mitchell and the Hi Rhythm Band featuring Charles Hodges organ, Leroy Hodges bass, Mabon "Teenie" Hodges guitar, drummers Howard Grimes and Al Jackson Jr. with assistance of trumpeter Wayne Jackson and saxophonist Andrew Love of the Memphis Horns.

Behind Al Green's ascension in the 1970's hit parade was the hands-on addition of Hi Records producer, bandleader and trumpeter Willie Mitchell.

In 2009, the Fat Possum label licensed the Hi Records catalog.

"Ann Peebles' smoky voice really got the blood boiling," volunteered Paul Body, an L.A. based drummer/writer.

"I remember the first time I heard 'I Can't Stand The Rain' during the fall of '73. It really knocked me out because it sounded so mysterious. It sounded like she was channeling Ma Rainey. It was way too bluesy for the soul station back then but it was a huge hit. I saw her later and she was a juke joint hot with the Hi band pumping the groove behind her.

"I was there that night at the Troubadour club when John

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Lennon was yelling out what he would like to do to Ann Peebles. Although he was rude and crude I knew where he was coming from.

"All I can say about Al Green and Teenie Hodges is that they wrote 'Love and Happiness,' one of the all-time groove songs. Man, that thing just smoked. It might have been the best song that they ever wrote together. I remember listening to it up the Russian River thirty odd years ago and it blew the roof off the pad.

"I saw Teenie Hodges once in person and he was a small cat but he could make that soul music rumble. He didn't strangle a guitar like a lot of guys did back then. He caressed it just like a woman.

"Those early Al Green and Willie Mitchell things were so locomotive. Some of the time they sounded like a southbound train and other times they percolated like hot coffee," suggested Body.

"Willie Mitchell had the coolest drum sound happening," Paul reinforced. "Have to give Al Jackson, Jr. and Howard Grimes their props. They were the engine that made that groove happen. Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder got all the glory in the 70's but Willie and Al had the soul, blood and guts. Without them the 70's would have been the early '50's."

"Have to give Al Jackson, Jr. and Howard Grimes their props... Marvin Gaye and Stevie Wonder got all the glory in the '70s but Willie and Al had the soul, blood and guts. Without them the '70s would have been the early '50s."

PAUL BODY

"I first became aware of Willie Mitchell," added multi-instrumentalist Chris Darrow "like most people, through Al Green and Ann Peebles records. In my estimation 'I Can't Stand The Rain' is one of the most perfect records ever made. The driving grooves and the dark, yet effective, tonality really got to me.

"However it was the album *Total Explosion*, by Syl Johnson, a great overlooked singer, who really turned me on. He was a funkier, a more raw version of Al Green, who played the harmonica. I think his raspy voice and harder approach got to me more than the prettier Al Green records. But it was always the rhythm section that set the tone of the Hi Records albums."

Since the late seventies, Mitchell worked with Rod Stewart, Solomon Burke, Buddy Guy and My Morning Jacket at his Memphis-based Royal Studios.

The facility was the site of

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several sessions for Stewart's *Atlantic Crossing* solo LP and Keith Richards's debut solo album *Talk is Cheap* that is now being reissued March 29th with six bonus selections.

In the May 2001 issue of *MOJO* magazine, writer Robert Gordon described the Hi Studio which was built as a movie house in 1915 and converted in 1957 to Royal Studios when it became the home of the Hi Records label and the Hi Rhythm Section.

"The Hi Studio is located in an old movie theatre, the Royal. The control room used to be in the projection booth but has moved to the back of the studio floor, which still slopes. They began with a two-track machine and by the time they were done with Al Green's hits, they'd linked four together, wired so that only two machines-four tracks-could record simultaneously. Willie Mitchell was innovative and exacting, and achieved his multi-layered sound with antiquated equipment." Mitchell favored RCA ribbon microphones.

Since Willie Mitchell's 2010 death, Marc Ronson and Bruno Mars recorded the smash hit "Uptown Funk" at Royal Studios. Engineer Lawrence "Boo" Mitchell, Willie's son, won a Grammy for his work on "Uptown Funk," while Ronson produced the bulk of his *Uptown Special* in 2015 at Royal. Robert Plant, Paul Rogers, Elton John, and Snoop Dogg have cut tracks in the fabled room.

WILLIE MITCHELL INTERVIEW

IN 2004 I CONDUCTED A phone interview with Willie Mitchell in Memphis, Tennessee.

In my conversation with Mitchell, we discussed his landmark recording and production career, Hi Records, and life in the studio with his most important talent vocal discovery the former Albert Greene, aka Al Green.

A small portion of our interview was quoted in author Jimmy McDonough's book *Soul Survivor: A Biography of Al Green*.

HK: Where were you born?

WM: Ashland, Mississippi. My parents moved to Memphis when I was three. I studied music at Melrose High and then Rust College. Before I went to college, there was a Memphis musician named Onzie Horn, whom I lived with for a while when I was 16. He showed me the Schillinger system (a music method) he had learned in Chicago. He studied with Billy Strayhorn and Quincy Jones.

Al Green on *The Mike Douglas Show*, 1973

WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Q: You were around Hi Records for years before they let you get close to the recording console.

A: I had done an album with O.V. Wright, *Eight Men and Four Women* which became a huge R&B smash for Don Robey and Duke/Peacock Records. Then they sent me Bobby "Blue" Bland and I did an album with them. Then more people began to come. Charlie and Inez Foxx and I would always say to Joe, 'I don't like the sounds I'm getting out of this place. We can do better than this.'

I told them I wanted to run the board. For my first session, I cut "Soul Serenade," which turned out to be a big R&B and pop record. King Curtis had had a pretty good hit on it. I said "we're gonna do it funky and simple." It became a huge hit.

Then we started working with Ann Peebles. A trumpet player, Gene "Bowlegs" Miller, brought her up to me and said, "Willie, this girl has a good voice." I told him, "All she needs is material." So we went into the studio with her and the first record went around 100,000. She became popular on the blues and R&B market. This was before Al Green.

Q: There is almost a mathematical production style and the way you employ sparse instrumentation on many of the recordings we've heard the last 30 years. I know the Schllinger system involved music notes as mathematics. From listening to these Hi Records recordings, I noticed you used big, semi-jazz chords in your charts.

A: When I began work with Al Green, I applied some of those different things. Especially on "I'm Still In Love With You." You'll find lots of those big chords there. I used freak chords on "Let's Stay Together."

Al would come to the house and eat and sleep. My wife cooked for him. I used to play him records and say, "Listen to the notes and how they are posted." In fact, Al and I used to spend as much as 10-15 hours a day just studying.

Q: How did you first meet Al Green in 1968?

A: We were booked in Midland, Texas. It was a real hot day. 109 degrees in the shade. It was a huge club that seated 2,500 people. When I pulled in, Al Green came up to me and said, 'Hey man, I'm stranded here. Could I sing a couple of songs? You could give me enough money to get me back home to Michigan.' So I let him and Al starts singing a Sam & Dave song when we were going over what songs we were gonna do. I was gonna give him $50.

Then he starts singing and I told my brother, "Hold the

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band a minute." I said, "Come over here, kid. Man, you got a great voice. Why don't you go back to Memphis with me? We got a little label called Hi Records and we can cut some records." And he said, "Well, how long will it take for me to be a star?" I told him about 18 months. He said, "I don't have that long."

Reverend Al Green performs at the Chumash Casino, 2006

DWIGHT MCCANN/WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

So we played the gig that night. I was really amazed at his voice. The way he sounded. The way he delivered a song. So after the gig, we were packing up the bus and a car had blocked the driveway and we couldn't leave. We were sitting there ready to go.

So there's a knock on my window. "Hey man, you said it would take 18 months for me to become a star." I said, "Somewhere in that area." He said, "Nah. I'm not going." Then the car in front of me got started and we went to pull out and he said, "Yeah, I'm going."

So he came to Memphis. We are about ten minutes from Memphis, about to cross the bridge and he says, "I have to go back to Grand Rapids, Michigan... I'm gonna need some money." "Uh-oh. Here it comes." 'To get myself straight in Grand Rapids so I can come back and work, I'll need $1,500." That was big money in 1969. So I said, "O.K. kid, I'm gonna give you this money. Now go back, straighten yourself out and come back."

He was real cocky, but I liked his attitude. I put him on the bus and three months later, I would think, "That little... took my money and I don't even have an address or phone number with his name."

Then one night, we played a college in Louisville,

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Kentucky, came home at 6:30 a.m. and somebody starts bangin' on the door and Al Green is standing there. I let him in and showed him where he needed to go. He said, "'Don't you remember me? I'm Al Green." I had forgotten him. He had my money. I got him an apartment, but he was getting frustrated.

He cut a version of the Beatles' "I Want To Hold Your Hand." We came up with a thing called "You Said," which did about 100,000. I wasn't satisfied with that. I said, "We're off on a Sly Stone groove and we've got to find our own thing."

Q: What was the initial session like in 1970?

A: He was singing too hard. I told him he had to soften down. Then we cut a version of the Temptations' "I Can't Get Next To You." that did about 700,000. It showed that he was still singing hard but he had such command. That sort of launched him into getting some gigs. Then we started cutting an album, *Green Is Blue*. He was up in Detroit and brought in this song, "Tired Of Being Alone." And when I heard the song, I knew that was gonna be it.

It hung around February to July and we sold about 900 of 'em. And I said, "I can't be this wrong. This song was gonna be a hit." So I went to Atlanta, Georgia to radio station WAOK. I sat with the DJ and the record busted there. We did 30,000 the first week. I called back to Memphis at WGIA, who I dropped the record already and told them, "We got somethin' goin' on." Then I went to New York and all hell broke loose. It ended up doing 1.5 million. I told Al, "You've been singing hard."

Q: I always heard that when Al was in England on his first tour, you really developed your own sound for him at that point back home.

A: When Al was in England, I came up with the melody for "Let's Stay Together." When he came back, we would stay at the piano from 9 in the morning until 11 at night. Just a piano and a tape recorder and he'd sing. In 15 minutes, all the lyrics were down for "Let's Stay Together." I was getting' hot. I wanted 500,000 copies pressed on "Let's Stay Together." They thought I was crazy. The record came out on Monday and by Thursday it was gold. Then, "Call Me."

Q: What were Al Green's greatest strengths in the recording process?

A: The main thing is, Al could sing in tune. Once he got a hook on a song, it was hard to beat him. The song was dead. We had six years of nothing but gold and platinum records with Al. Then we finally hit with Ann Peebles' "I Can't Stand The Rain." That was good. Did some really good stuff with Syl Johnson. We did the rhythm tracks, Al Green or whoever would sing their part, and we'd build from that.

Q: I'm amazed listening to the drum sounds on your productions, with Al Jackson's pulsating drums and Howard Grimes on conga. The songs still jump out of the radio.

A: Al Jackson was my drummer until his death. Howard Grimes had cut for Stax, recorded with Rufus Thomas and still worked with me. Every time I cut Al Green, I would have both Howard and Al on hand to play.

Harvey Kubernik is an author of 15 books. In November 2006, Harvey Kubernik was a featured speaker discussing audiotape preservation and archiving at special hearings called by The Library of Congress and held in Hollywood, California.

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On the Flipside

Shocking Blue's "Hot Sand," the B-side of their hit single "Venus" was a sultry revelation – and a bargain at five bucks!

BY NICK ARIETANO

Imagine my delight in not only finding the original press of this 45 but discovering it had a U.S. picture sleeve! "Venus" was a huge hit for the "Nederbeat" psychedelic rock group in 1969, and being a flipside collector I had to indulge in "Hot Sand." So I fired up (pun intended) my Pro-Ject Music Hall turntable and gave it a spin... and another... and another. It surely helped that I found this gem in very good plus condition for five bucks!

The fidelity on the single version is absolutely astonishing! The mono mix is terrific because it has Mariska's vocals come right at you at the start of the song and Robbie Van Leeuwen's sitar (one only has to hear this guy play the Indian instrument as a lead guitar and find out how underrated he is as a musician) brings a bright and brilliant psychedelic-rock feel to the recording.

The instrumental breaks feature Robbie on sitar and guitar, Klassje van der Wal on bass, and Cor Van der Beek on drums, and they rock out so well together. It's more than just a rock and roll tune, it is a well-crafted work of art. Listen to Mariska belt out the verses: "Summer day over, and darkness comes with mighty wings"/The seagull's head is tired, and when he's tired, then he sings.." Robbie van Leeuwen answers each with a tremendous sitar phrasing. Then Mariska bears her soul with the chorus "Hot Sand!" I'm walking in the hot sand! Makin' love in the hot sand... together with you..." I'm spinning this track as I'm writing and I become more and more enamored with it as I do so.

The lyrics are so well-written and delightfully cryptic and Mariska delivers them with perfection, especially: "If you wonder why baby, if you wonder what you hear"/ "It's useless to describe, even wonder of what's in your ear."

Then comes the sultry, sexy and alluring anticlimactic chorus which finds Mariska reassuring her love interest: "Hot Sand...it's so good in the hot sand...I'm strollin' in the hot sand...together with you...yeah yeah yeah, yeah yeah yeah..." and then the fade. "Hot Sand" proves that a song can make you appreciate life's simple pleasures in a little over two-and-a-half minutes.

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Wynton Kelly Lost in Boston

BY ARMAND LEWIS

In the 1950s and early '60s, Miles Davis had the band in modern jazz. If a musician played with Miles, it was practically automatic that record contracts would follow almost immediately. John Coltrane, Bill Evans and Cannonball Adderley among others went from being thought of as solid journeymen players to being literally stars seemingly overnight. While this superstardom would elude some Davis alumni, basically all of Miles' groups would have substantial careers after striking out on their own.

Pianist Wynton Kelly would play in the Davis group from march of 1959 through May of 1961. During this relatively brief period, Kelly would appear on several of Miles' best acoustic era LPs, including on the first session of what would become the landmark LP *Kind of Blue*.

He would also appear on *Someday My Prince Will Come* and *Miles Davis — In Person Saturday/Sunday at the Blackhawk*. Throughout this time, Kelly would make numerous albums as a sideman as well as several LPs under his own name.

Born in Jamaica and raised in Brooklyn from age four, Wynton Charles Kelly began his professional piano career when he was just twelve years old. At age sixteen, he played on a number one R&B hit (Hal Singer's "Cornbread") before going on to work with everyone from Babs Gonzales and Eddie "Cleanhead" Vinson to Dizzy Gillespie and Dinah Washington – all before making his first trio recording for Blue Note at age twenty.

Kelly would spend much of the early and mid 1950s with Dinah Washington before freelancing during the later part of the decade. After his tenure with Miles' group, Kelly would form his own trio with two other ex-Miles Davis band members: bassist Paul Chambers and drummer Jimmy Cobb.

Initially hiring themselves out as a rhythm section for other jazz stars, the trio would soon record for Verve Records, where they would record several LPs including the classic *Smokin' at the Half Note* with Wes Montgomery.

By the mid '60s, touring would dominate the group's schedule and on a couple of stops in Boston, Kelly' group would do local broadcasts. Tapes from two such programs have recently been discovered and released as *Wynton Kelly – Unissued in Boston* (Phono PHN 870280)

The first half of the CD contains a broadcast from

CONTINUED ON PAGE 46

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BE BOP CONTINUED FROM PAGE 44

October 1967 featuring bassist Cecil McBee substituting for Paul Chambers on Charlie Parker's composition "Confirmation" and the standards "Old Folks" as well as the ballad "Speak Low."

Chambers returns for the second half - originally broadcast in March of 1965. He provides a particularly strong solo on "Blues on Purpose," which also contains possibly Kelly's best work on this CD.

Wynton Kelly, circa 1957
SHAW ARTISTS CORPORATION/WIKIMEDIA

On the last two tracks from 1965, the trio is joined by trumpeter Roy Eldridge. Eldridge was something of a transitional figure in jazz history and has been described as a bridge between the traditional style of Louis Armstrong and the bop modernism of Dizzy Gillespie. A regular with "Jazz at the Philharmonic" during the 1950s and '60s, "Little Jazz," as Eldridge was known, can be heard on "Blues" and on the particularly pleasing medley of "Lady Be Good," "Hackensack" and "Rifftide."

Though they would only make one more trio recording (*Wynton Kelly – Last Trio Session* on Delmark, 1968), the late 1960s would find the trio supporting such jazz heavyweights as Joe Henderson and George Coleman. The relative few trio sessions by Kelly makes this release a very welcome addition to an admittedly small catalog of recordings.

Armand Lewis buys and sells rare Jazz LPs. He can be reached at mrbluenote@peoplepc.com

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